

Teaching Suggestions: Geology Activity #11

The Legend of Tis-Se'-Yak

As told by Frank La Pena and Craig Bates

Background Information:

This story is best told at the end of the geology hike and shares the Yosemite Awahnichi Indian explanation of how certain Yosemite Valley landmarks were formed. This legend describes how Half Dome, North Dome, and Basket Dome came to be. If you look closely at the lichen-streaked face of Half Dome, you can see a woman's profile, with a nose, an eye with dark tears streaming down, and dark cropped hair with bangs. The rock figures mentioned in the legend of Tis-se'-yak are Half Dome (which represents Tis-se'-yak's face), North Dome (her husband), and Basket Dome (her upturned basket). Lake A-wai'-a is now called Mirror Lake.

Concepts and Vocabulary:

Awahnichi Indian explanation of formation of some of Yosemite Valley's landmarks.

If You are Taking the Virtual Hike

This activity contains no interactions, but rather simply presents the story as an interesting end to this section. When students finish reading the story, they have finished their "hike" along Mirror Lake Trail and can continue to any part of the web site they wish to visit. You may also want to reconvene the class at this point to discuss what they have learned in the online Activities section.

If You are Visiting the Park and Hiking the Trail

Materials:

Picture of face of Half Dome showing Tis-se'-yak's profile. You can print the enlarged view of Half Dome, which students will see if they click the image on screen #11.

Site:

A large space where the class can sit comfortably; best at Mirror Lake across from the face of Half Dome (stop #11 on the Mirror Lake trail map).

Time:

10 minutes

Activity:

Read the story to students as they look at Half Dome and try to find the profile of Tis-se'-yak's face.

A woman, Tis-se'-yak, and her husband traveled from a country very far off, and entered the Valley of Ah-wah'-nee footsore and weary. She walked before her husband, bowing far forward under the heavy burden of her great conical basket, which was strapped across her forehead. He followed easily after her with a rude staff in this hand and a roll of animal skins flung over his back.

After their long journey across the mountains, they were very thirsty and hurried to find cool water to drink. The woman was in front, so she was the first to reach the lake called A-wai'-a. She quickly dipped up the lake water in her basket and drank long and deep. She was so thirsty, she drank up all the water and drained the lake dry before her husband arrived.

Because the woman had drunk up all the water, there came a severe drought in the valley of Ah-wah'-nee, and the earth was dried up so that it yielded neither herb nor grass. The woman's actions greatly displeased

her husband, and his wrath was made greater because he had no water. In this anger, he took up his staff and beat the woman soundly. She fled from him, but he pursued her and beat her still more. The woman wept and became enraged herself. She turned about and scolded her husband, then flung her basket at him.

At the very moment that they stood facing each other, the woman and her husband were turned to stone for their wickedness. There they have remained to this day. The basket (Basket Dome) lies upturned beside the husband (North Dome), and the woman's rock face (face of Half Dome) is stained with the long dark lines of her tears.

Note: Frank La Pena and Craig Bates took this story from *Tribes of California* by Powers (p. 367) and use his spelling. Many other versions of this legend have been published; however this version is probably closer to the original story. Most of the other stories are more detailed and include origins of other Yosemite Valley landmarks. In one version Tis-se'-yak carries a basket full of seeds and a baby on a cradleboard. Her husband beats her with a white oak club. The seeds are planted and establish the variety of plant foods that exist in Yosemite Valley. The cradle board is thrown against the valley's north wall becomes the Royal Arches, and the husband becomes Washington Column.